

# The *Missa Papae Marcelli* in Carl von Winterfeld's Palestrina Biography (1832)

## Carl von Winterfeld

Carl von Winterfeld (1784–1852) was a Prussian Judicial Counsel who was also a member of Zelter's *Singakademie* in Berlin. He studied Italian sacred music intensely and concentrated mainly on Venice and especially Giovanni Gabrieli.

As a Northern German Protestant he strongly opposed the views of the Cecilian movement concerning sacred music which mainly drew on Palestrina as a mythological figure who had saved church music from abolition.

Winterfeld is often seen as one of the fathers of historical musicology as he often stated the importance of relying on sources and also worked by this principle.



## Winterfeld's Palestrina Biography

Winterfeld's Palestrina biography is not an original work, it rather is a critique of Giuseppe Baini's main work, a biography which the head of the Sistine Chapel Choir had written about his predecessor.

At first, Winterfeld mentions the positive aspects of Baini's research as he extols his extensive source work and also his approach to formerly widespread myths.

His main points of criticism are the lack of neutrality and references to Palestrina's contemporaries in Baini's analysis of Palestrina's historical importance as well as his categorization of Palestrina's works into 10 styles.



## Missa Papae Marcelli (1562)

The Missa Papae Marcelli is one of the best-known and most-played works of renaissance music. This does not at last come down to the mythologization of the work and with that, also of its author, as the savior of church music.

Both Baini and Winterfeld stress that – while it was probably performed for a committee of cardinals who were assigned the task of deciding the Catholic church's music policy, it was not performed for pope Marcellus II in 1555, saving church music from abolition.

On the other hand Winterfeld criticizes Baini for assigning one style of Palestrina's work solely to this Mass, due to the fact that he still described the *Missa Papae Marcelli* as the one composition that convinced the cardinals not to prohibit musical practice in churches.

Winterfeld's perception proved true as modern research deems it likely that works by other composers were performed besides Palestrina's masses for the cardinals. Additionally, the actual influence of these performances on the faith of music in the church can not be reconstructed.

## The Palestrina Myth's Influence on 19th Century Composing

Not only supporters of the Cecilian movement viewed Palestrina as the ideal church composer. Apart from the Catholic *stile antico* it also inspired the so-called *Palestrina style* which was carried into the 20th century by Knud Jeppesen. He wanted to reestablish a tighter relation between the theoretical doctrine and its historical origin.

Counterpoint was a main subject for many composing students in the 19th century. This means that the discourse about the *correct* style of counterpoint was not merely theoretical but rather influenced multiple generations of composers centuries after Palestrina's death.

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Lucas Mathäser, B.A. (Musicology/History), B.Mus.  
[lmathaes@students.uni-mainz.de](mailto:lmathaes@students.uni-mainz.de)  
FB 07: Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften  
Institut für Kunstgeschichte und Musikwissenschaft